BONDS

A Hatoful Boyfriend Zine

Bonds

A HATOFUL BOYFRIEND ZINE

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The Moon

a friendship sturdy with a strong birdie

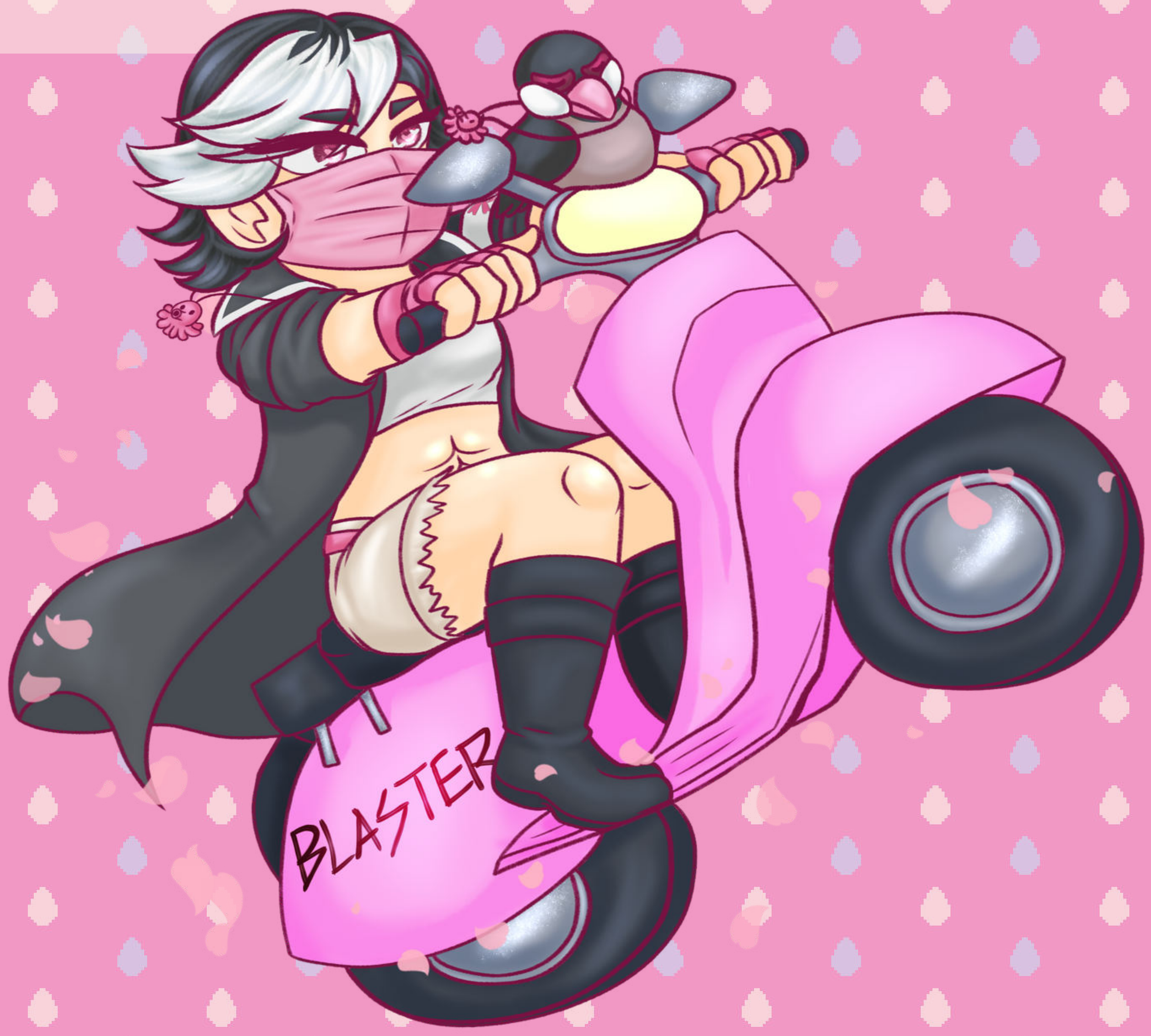
BY CRESCENTTWINS

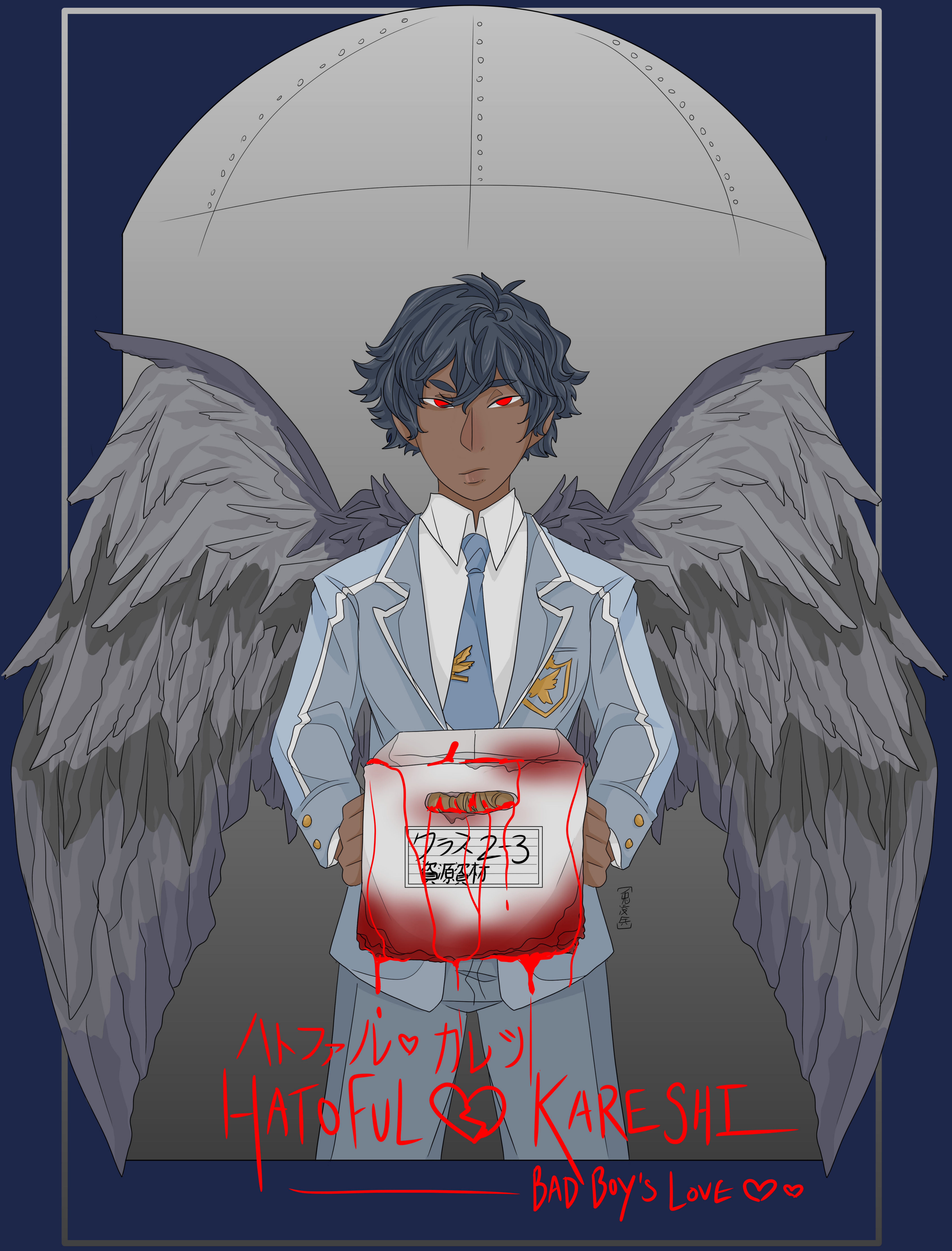
Whether you're bird or cave dweller,
Put your faith in this takoyaki seller.
Although Azami is a small sparrow
She's solid steel right down to her marrow.

And if she likes the cut of your jib
Have heart! Don't fart! Her words are not glib
That sparrow admires your control
And how you've carved it into your soul

Azami's your friend now and that's no play
Traffic or dreams, she won't lead you astray
If caught between punkgeons and hard brick
Azami assists with a Sparrow Kick

Fighting back to back, from streets to cafe
With her by your side you won't lose your way
But if you look close at her scooter
You wonder what kind of love might suit her.

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鬼皮兵
ハトファル♡カレツ
HATOFUL ♡ KARESHI
BAD BOY'S LOVE ♡♡

CATCHER IN THE RYE

Blue Footprints and Music Notes

BY LINK

There was a time when Ryouta was disappointed he never saw the footprints that would lead him to his soulmate. He’d secretly hoped that they would just appear one day, and he’d follow coloured footprints down a very familiar path to his best friend’s cave. But that never happened. Then his mom died and he began to hope he’d never spot those footprints. Because he hated the idea of leaving behind his soulmate and while he knew he would die one day, seeing the flatline on his mom’s heart monitor made it all the more real. When Ryouta made it through high school and then university without seeing them, it felt like a breath of relief. Maybe he would never see them. (The funniest thing was that it looped back around not long after he graduated. He tried to pretend it didn’t, but it did. Once more the mystery and the magic of soulmates and coloured footprints enveloped his brain like he was a child again and despite his efforts, there were nights where he would stare at his ceiling and wonder what colour he might follow and what kind of person they might lead him to.)

It's late in the evening, after his shift at the maid café, when his eyes latch on a light blue. Footprints. They seem to glow under the lights of the city. They seem to stretch forever. Ryouta looked behind himself questioningly. Because this was a question. Would he ignore them and go on his way, back to the small apartment in the city he never left even when his friends all did? Or would he follow them? The choice would change his life forever.

He wasn't sure he actually had a choice. The nights had grown colder, longer lately. Winter was close. So much of his nights were spent thinking about and then trying not to think about soulmates.

Ryouta adjusted his bag and followed.

They led him to another café and part of him wanted to laugh. After his shifts, he didn't usually want to enter other cafés. Looking up at the fancy white sign with its silvery cursive writing, he still didn't want to go in. But the footprints went under the door. Someone gave him a weird look before they entered the building. The door stayed open for a tantalizing moment. Before he could really think about it, his hand wrapped around the handle.

The café was warm. Both in temperature and appearance. Homey browns and yellows filled the interior. All of the furniture seemed wooden. It almost reminded him of when he worked for Kenzaburou. It wasn't anything like what he'd expected from the sign outside and he was glad for it. There was piano music, but he didn't really pay attention to it. Not until he realized that the piano was exactly where the footprints led to. He sat down at a table between the piano and the door, taking care to walk in a path slightly out of the normal walking path to at least slightly disguise his own footprints. So he wouldn't distract the pianist. When a waiter came over he ordered a coffee. Then he just… watched and listened. The piano was sleek black. There didn't seem to be anything on it, whether it be handprints or dust or dirt. Somehow it almost seemed to sparkle. The person playing it had light blue hair and a grey jacket that looked soft even from this distance. Ryouta didn't know how long he stayed there. Just that it was long enough for his coffee to go cold. When the pianist started to pack up, Ryouta paid his bill to leave. He… didn't really want to approach his soulmate tonight. It felt out of character to just suddenly approach someone with the term 'soulmate', especially when that someone was a stranger. Though he also didn't want to miss his opportunity all together. Maybe it was the memory of his feelings when he was younger, but somehow just being here had felt magical. And he found that he didn't want to risk losing his soulmate after all.

"The pianist," Ryouta asked the waiter as they took his half full mug, "do they play here often?"

The waiter looked over to the piano. "Yeah, he does. Did you want to hear him more?"

Ryouta followed their gaze. "Yeah, I think I do."

"He's here every Wednesday and Friday night and sometimes Saturdays," The waiter said.

"Thank you."

✧✧✧

Ryouta sat at the same table when he came in Friday after work. The pianist was there, just as he'd been told. "His name is Sakuya," answered the same waiter who served him last time.

"No last name?" Ryouta questioned.

The waiter shook their head. “Not that he’s told any of us. He’s surprisingly quiet and secretive, given how much he yells at us sometimes.” They laughed like it was a joke and Ryouta wasn’t quite sure what to take about… anything in that statement.

“Does he yell a lot?” Ryouta tried not to sound worried. He didn’t think he liked the idea of a soulmate who would yell at him all the time.

“Only when we’re ‘idiot mongrels’ and don’t clean up properly or hurt ourselves.” The waiter winked at him. “He’s a sweetheart, but don’t tell him I said that.”

Well, Ryouta wasn’t sure he believed that. But he didn’t really know Sakuya, so he didn’t really want to form an opinion yet. Not a full one. After he asked more questions about him and actually talked to him. For now, Ryouta sipped at his coffee and watched and listened.

✧✧✧

The pieces Sakuya picked always seemed to be classical. As far as Ryouta could tell, at least. There weren’t too many that he could actually name. But he recognized enough of them from music class that he was pretty confident the songs were largely classical. One of them sounded like something from Vivaldi’s Four Seasons. Maybe Autumn? He rested his head in his palm and smiled. Somehow it felt like a goodbye to autumn and a greeting to winter’s longer nights.

It hadn’t occurred to Ryouta until then that he hadn’t thought much about winter’s chill or the long nights lately. He didn’t know if it was the presence of his soulmate, the café itself, the waiter who always answered his questions, or the pieces the pianist chose. He settled back into his chair. The coffee mug cradled between his hands warmed them. And as Sakuya’s music washed over him, he decided the answer to that didn’t really matter.

“You know, you’ve asked me a lot of questions about Sakuya,” the waiter who always served him said, their arms crossed over the back of the unoccupied chair at the table that had somehow become Ryouta’s. “Why don’t you ask him some?”

Ryouta blinked at them and looked over to where Sakuya was playing what sounded like Moonlight Sonata. A beautiful and almost haunting melody. Ask him… “Uh, no, I couldn’t,” Ryouta said, flushing. It had been more than enough weeks, but Ryouta still couldn’t imagine just going to Sakuya.

The waiter shrugged and straightened to leave. As they left, though, “He asks me about you, too, if you’re worried. I don’t think he’ll say anything to you first, but I don’t mind being a carrier for information if you want to wait.”

As the music got faster, Ryouta looked back at the piano. So Sakuya had noticed him too and watched from afar like he did. A corner of his mouth lifted. Birds of a feather. Maybe that was a sign about compatibility. This time, when Sakuya finished and he paid his bill, Ryouta walked to the piano instead of the door.

“Ah, so my coward of a soulmate finally approaches,” are the first words Ryouta’s soulmate ever says to him. Ryouta paused. Partly to take the words in and partly in surprise. The waiter had told him Sakuya was prickly. But it still felt unexpected.

“You didn't approach me, either,” Ryouta said.

“What?” The boy looked back at him.

“You obviously knew I was your soulmate. But you didn't approach me,” Ryouta said.

“I-” The boy’s mouth opened and closed a few times, no further words coming out. There was a flush to his cheeks. “Of course I didn't. I had a job to do and by the time I noticed your footprints you were likely long gone.”

“You’ve noticed me more than once though, haven’t you?” Ryouta pointed out. The flush grew darker. The boy looked away.

“Perhaps.”

Ryouta hummed. “So what was the last song you played? I didn’t recognize it,” he asked instead of mentioning anything else about Sakuya’s hypocriticalness. Really, he probably felt just as awkward as Ryouta did.

Sakuya ‘tch’ed. “Of course I get an uncultured soulmate too.” Ryouta wasn’t sure if the words or the fact Sakuya said them without looking at him felt more rude. “It was Tchaikovsky’s Waltz no.9, Opus 40.”

“Oh,” Ryouta said, a bit awkwardly.

“Is that all you wanted from me?” Sakuya asked. He slung the sidebag he used to carry his music onto his shoulder. It was a fancy black like the piano and seemed equally well cared for. In truth, there really wasn’t anything else Ryouta wanted. He hadn’t exactly had a plan when he approached Sakuya. All he knew was that he’d wanted to talk to him for a long time and he didn’t really have a reason to delay it anymore.

“Can I see you again?” He wanted to get to know his soulmate. Maybe take him on a date.

Sakuya raised an eyebrow at him. “I’ll see you when I play on Friday, won’t I?”

“Yeah,” Ryouta said.

“Then it’s settled,” Sakuya said.

“But that’s not what I meant…” Ryouta trailed off. But what he meant, he didn’t get to say. Sakuya left before he could.

✧✧✧

The last song Sakuya played on Friday was much shorter than anything he usually played. It was sad and lilting. If he closed his eyes he could almost imagine fading into the background; the moment he let go of his hope for a soulmate. And fade as that hope returned. Circling back like a ghost of an old friend. By the time the last note ended, he was next to the piano.

“What was that, it sounded different than usual?” Ryouta asked.

Sakuya looked down at his hands, still resting on the keys. “Tsuioku by TAM. And that’s because it was. I’d heard it a few days ago and thought it reminded me of you.”

“It was pretty,” Ryouta said. “But rather sad and short.” And rather accurate. Though, it didn’t feel as accurate as it definitely would have before he’d walked into this café weeks ago.

“Hm.” Sakuya looked at him from under his bangs. “Then perhaps we should meet outside this establishment and we can fix that.”

“Like a date?” Ryouta asked, hopeful but unsure. From what he learned from the waiter and the short time he spoke to Sakuya last time, Sakuya didn’t seem like someone who would do anything impulsively. Like go on a date with a stranger. Even if that stranger was his soulmate. Though, Sakuya had obviously thought about him. Enough to… be reminded of him, when hearing a song. This was the first time music ever made him feel special. The chances were this wasn't impulsive at all. Date or not, Ryouta was just really happy that Sakuya wanted to spend time with him.

“Meet me here at noon precisely.” Sakuya straightened up his sheet music a final time before he returned it to his bag and stood up. His cheeks were tinted a bright red. That did not stop him from meeting Ryouta's eyes. “If you wish to date me, impress me.”

Ryouta felt his own cheeks heat as he watched Sakuya head out the door, his heart doing something funny in his chest.

End

@cuttledraws

櫻武夢蝶
HM

A Simple-ish Study Date

BY SUNNY/OMORI

With summer practically on the horizon, things at St. Pigeonation's were starting to get busy. With final exams right around the corner, studying and preparing oneself was crucial now more than ever. Everyone had their own ways of studying (or lack of for some), and with previous exam scores to reflect and look back on, everyone was simply crunching time to get ready. In the case of Hiyoko, studying for finals would either make it or break it for her. Granted, it wasn't *that* dramatic, but anything near the end of the year always felt dire. She wasn't in the mood to get enrolled into any sort of summer school; avoiding summer school was her main determination. But at the same time, there was nothing wrong with hitting the books and cramming (mostly useless) knowledge into one's head.

Nageki, on the other hand, didn't have to worry about studying at all. One could say it was one of the few benefits to being a ghost. He didn't consider it that, but he also didn't consider it to be a curse either. It was simply something he had. That's it.

However, he considered Hiyoko's presence to be nothing short of a blessing. If he could, he'd spend more time with her, but being held back from being with the one you love was something he had sadly grown used to. Still, this didn't deter him from talking to her whenever she appeared in the library. But he also acknowledged the importance of academics, so whenever he saw her enter the library with a determined expression on her face, he knew he had no right to waste any of her time. He could always spend time reading a book anyway. Alas, a question had taken root in his head as of lately, and he couldn't help but finally speak out on it once Hiyoko entered the library, same as all the other times.

"... Hiyoko, it's nice to see you here. How are you?" Nageki asked, tilting his head.

"Stressed. Finals are coming up, and I gotta study in order to pass. I am *not* about to fail and be forced to spend my summer in summer school," Hiyoko said, sitting down and laying out her textbooks. "I'll probably be here for a while."

“I don’t mind. It’s been quiet here anyway.”

It was silent for a few moments, with Nageki thinking about just chickening (pun-intended?) out. But thinking about how busy Hiyoko will most likely be during the summer, he wanted to spend as much time with her as possible.

“Hiyoko, may I ask you a question?”

“Of course! What is it?”

“Could we, um… could we make this a… a study date? I know it’s useless for me to study, but I’ve read almost every book in this library, and… I want to spend as much time with you as I can. We can just study together. I-If you want to, that is!”

Red began to hue Hiyoko’s cheeks, and she smiled. She gestured to the chair next to her and said: “I don’t know if studying is interesting enough for a date, but s-sure! I always enjoy spending time with you anyway.”

Nageki went over to sit down next to Hiyoko, who slid an opened textbook over to him. It was a simple mathematics textbook. With that, the date had ‘officially’ started, and the two of them began studying. Sunshine shone through the window, with partial heat beaming through and making the library well lit. Occasionally, Nageki glanced over at Hiyoko, watching her flip through textbook pages, write notes down, and even quietly quiz herself. To him, it was sort of adorable. It distracted him from his own studying, but that was the least of his concerns (for obvious reasons). But the cuteness of the girl next to him aside, he wasn’t able to fully focus on the textbook, and the fact that there wasn’t much (if any) interaction made him feel almost lonely, despite having a person literally next to him. He wasn’t a lovey-dovey lover boy, but the lack of romantic interaction filled his heart with sadness. Study dates in novels were usually more lively than this, but for every good novel was a bad novel, and thus for every good interaction was a bad one.

Yeah, she was right. As relaxing as studying was, it didn’t make for a perfect date. Maybe on paper and planned out in advance, it wouldn’t be *as* dull. But this was now, and right now, the silence was weighing heavily on Nageki. The faint tick-tocking of the nearby wall clock wasn’t much help; it only served to remind him that, funnily enough, almost an hour and a half had passed by. They say time flies by when you’re having fun, but Nageki wondered if the same applied to when you’re *not* having fun. Maybe he was just being selfish though. Maybe he shouldn’t say anything. Maybe he should force himself to study the quadratic formula and other (pretty much useless) math formulas. Maybe--

“--geki? Nageki? Hey, Earth to Nageki!”

Nageki was pulled back from his sudden train of thought, eyes now on Hiyoko. By now, she had filled up multiple pages of her notebooks with important notes and even makeshift study guides.

“... Ah, s-sorry. Were you saying something?” Nageki questioned.

“I was! I was asking if you were getting any studying done, ‘cause I plan on quizzing you once I’m done,” Hiyoko joked, giggling. “Kidding, kidding! I was asking if you were okay. You were staring and I figured you had something you wanted to say.”

“U-Uh, yeah, I do. Well…” Nageki trailed off, fidgeting in his chair.

“If you don’t wanna study, then that’s fine! You can read whatever you want.”

“... That’s not it. I want…” Nageki leaned in close and rested his head on Hiyoko’s shoulder, face bright red and hot to the touch. “I want you to take a break. I want to make this more of a ‘date’. It’s nice just being by your side, but… you feel warm. I want to cherish that warmth for as long as I can. Is that okay?”

Hiyoko’s face reddened just as much, and she timidly giggled as she wrapped her arm around him, resting her own head on his. “Sure. I think I could use a break right about now anyway.”

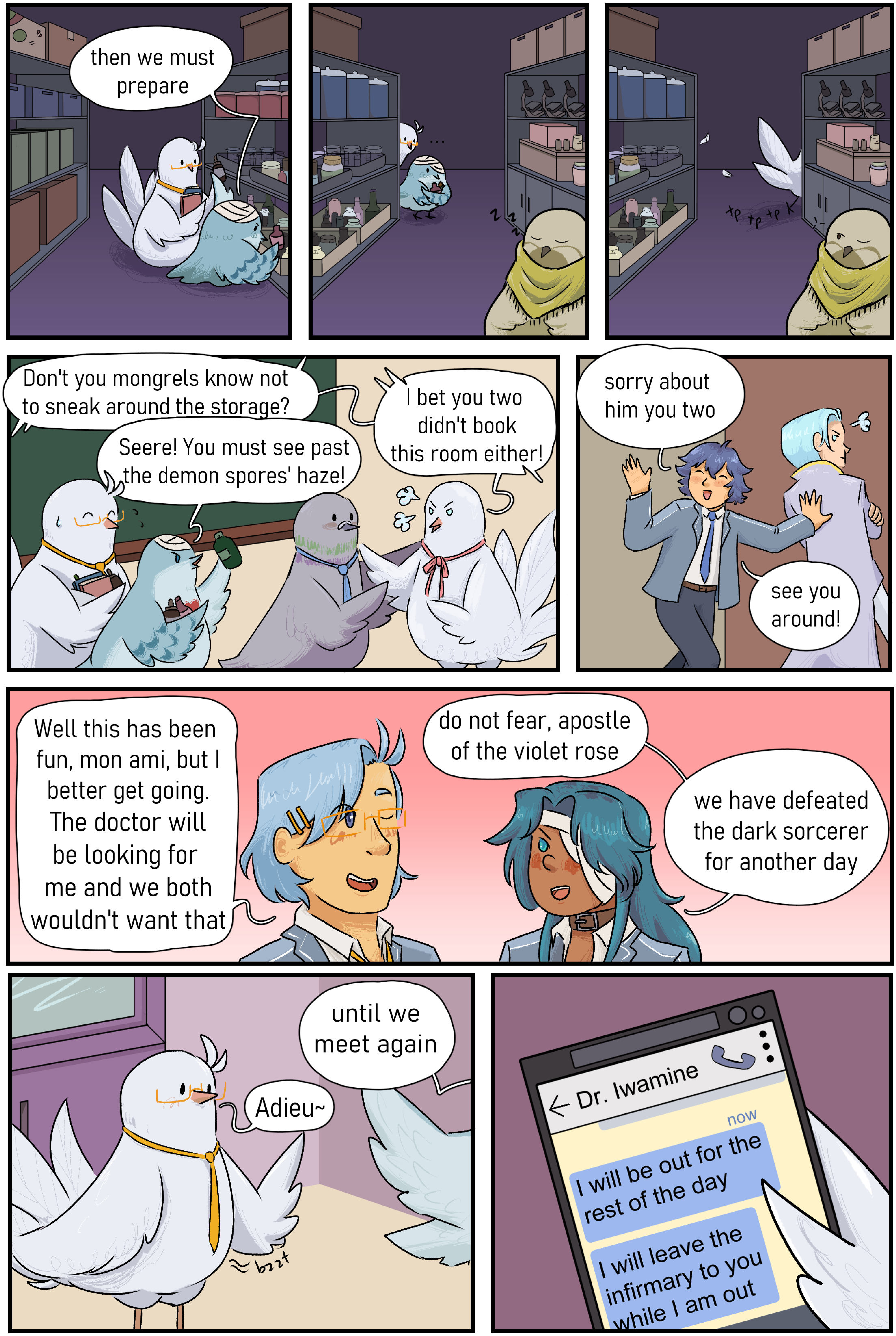
Not much more studying got done that day, but Hiyoko wasn’t going to complain anytime soon. There was always tomorrow, and any time spent with Nageki was time well spent. Ultimately, the feeling was mutual, and words couldn’t describe just how grateful Nageki was for just that.

End

CHARLIET.

To defeat Wallenstein,
But if you use that spell...
It must be done...

CAIN REPROBOS!
Ah, salut mon ami~
I'm always glad to see you, what brings you in today?
My crimson breast stirs-
the demonic tree of blight!
its presence grows stronger and stronger
it's only a matter of time before Wallenstein returns!
hmm...
yes, the doctor will be back from his errands soon -
THERE IS NO TIME!
WE MUST GO!!
Huh??
what's the rush?
the black miasma grows stronger by the day
keep your voice down, this is a library
Apostle of the Violet Rose, has the dark sorcerer Wallenstein poisoned you already?
Oh? Of course not, I'm here, aren't I~?


then we must prepare
...
z z
tp tp tp K
Don't you mongrels know not to sneak around the storage?
Seere! You must see past the demon spores' haze!
I bet you two didn't book this room either!
sorry about him you two
see you around!
Well this has been fun, mon ami, but I better get going. The doctor will be looking for me and we both wouldn't want that
do not fear, apostle of the violet rose
we have defeated the dark sorcerer for another day
until we meet again
Adieu~
bzzt
Dr. Iwamine
now
I will be out for the rest of the day
I will leave the infirmary to you while I am out

The Dreaded Door

BY HAMSTERCHEESE7

Another beautiful day at St. Pigeonations! The sun shines high in the sky, a gentle breeze blowing through the trees that line the grounds, into the open windows. The sound of students trilling in choir and music class echoes as Hiyoko races down the hall toward the library.

She hadn’t meant to be late but she always lost track of time when she was with Yuuya! He always managed to pop up at the worst times and distract her with his incorrigible flirting! At least she hadn’t missed the lunch session entirely, now Sakuya would only berate her and her barbarian (haha perhaps she was always in character!) time keeping skills a little bit.

She skidded to a stop outside the door, her powerful hunter gatherer thighs allowing her to twist on a dime and fling the door open instead of falling flat on her face. Except this was the library, not gym class, so the loud banging of the door crashing open was uh… less than appreciated.

“The Apostle of the Blue Sky has arrived as it was foretold!” Anghel crowed from the table in the middle of the library.

“You play a barbarian, must you act like one as well?” Sakuya huffed, feathers ruffling up. Ah, he was high and mighty today. Every day actually, but still!

“Hi Hiyoko,” Ryouta waved at her.

“Ryouta! You’re here today!” She whispered excitedly after closing the door much quieter and sending an apologetic smile in Nageki's direction toward the corner of the library. He eyed her over a book titled “Of Magic and Monsters”.

“They had to close for lunch at work due to an accident so I could join in,” Ryouta smiled as Hiyoko plopped herself into a chair. She only just then noticed the maid outfit he was still wearing.

“The Undertaker has graced us with his ceremonial garb,” Anghel said as Ryouta scratched the back of his head.

“So, as I was saying before Tosaka chose to grace us with her large presence,” Sakuya gestured down at the table as Hiyoko rolled her eyes, “I would like to see if the door is trapped.”

“You guys started without me?” Hiyoko looked at Anghel, surprised and a little hurt. Nobody could play her level 8 barbarian warrior quite the way she did. They lacked the stamina points! And her vivacious personality!

“Sorry Hiyoko, they wanted to make sure I got a chance to play,” Ryouta looked at her apologetically. Ah okay, that made sense.

“Okay, so what did I miss?” She stared down at the table, digging her character sheet out of her backpack. And the sandwich she snagged from the cafeteria–always had to eat when she could! Who knew when another meal would cross her path? The life of a hunter gatherer.

The table in question was covered in a map, small plastic figures grouped together in one corner. Anghel pulled her barbarian figure out of his backpack, wings fluttering, and placed it on the table. “Your heroes are seeking a way into the Castle of Ragnarok where thou hopeth to discover the Dark Grimoire and-”

“And the riches to elevate my elf bard into high society, as he should be,” Sakuya chirped. Hiyoko nodded.

“Alright let’s play!”

The castle was cold, the floor and the walls thrumming with energy. The smell of magic and evil was afoot, or that’s what Melodia said anyway. They were a cleric, so they should know! Edel Blau rested on her warhammer as Mozart studied the heavy wooden door that blocked their path.

“So, is it trapped?” She asked. He looked up at her, delicate elven eyebrows rising in annoyance.

“Of course it’s trapped, you imbecile.”

She rolled her eyes as a crack of lightning rumbled somewhere in the skies above. “So, can you untrap it?” She asked as Melodia shuffled in the corner, a small glow of magic emanating from their tiny form. Sensing evil or something. Edel could go for some evil right now, something to swing her hammer at!

“Are you sure it’s trapped? I don’t sense anything around it…” Melodia murmured.

“Does that count as meta-gaming?” Hiyoko asked. Sakuya glared at her. He was just mad because he rolled a one on detecting if the door was trapped or not.

“It shall be permitted,” Anghel said. Hiyoko shrugged as Sayuka looked triumphant. But he still rolled badly so…

“I shall attempt to disarm the door, stand back fools,” Mozart said, pulling out some very rusty looking thieves' tools. Edel had never seen him try to pick a lock before, but more power to him.

“Do you think this is the final door? Like the door to the boss? I hope we won’t be facing anything too hard…” Melodia frowned.

“Don’t worry! I’ll protect-”

“INFERNAL DOOR!” Mozart screeched as the lock picks broke.

“Two ones in a row? That’s not good,” Ryouta gave Sakuya a sympathetic look as he squawked furiously. Hiyoko cringed and smiled sheepishly in Nageki’s direction as he glared at them.

“Shhh, we’re in the library!”

“You dare shush me? I am a Le Bel!” But he quieted down.

“Maybe we should just… break the door down?” Melodia asked gently, poking two fingers together, long robes bunching up around their wrists. Edel perked up. That sounded like a job for her!

“I’ll take care of that!” She grinned, flexing her huge muscles that rippled in the light of the torch on the wall. With one huge arm, she grabbed her hammer and marched up to the door, forcing Mozart’s lithe form back and out of the way. He muttered something about her being rude but readied himself for the inevitable destruction of the door.

Edel steadied her legs, knees bent, bringing her hammer high overhead and with a mighty downswing-

“ANOTHER ONE?!” Hiyoko and Sakuya screeched as her twenty-sided die came to a rolling stop in the corner of the dicebox.

Nageki tutted in the corner as Ryouta shushed them and Anghel cackled.

As Edel brought her mighty hammer down, her feet slipped on water that had dribbled in from a crack in the old, worn stone ceiling! As she lost her balance, her hammer went flying, narrowly missing Mozart and embedding itself in the wall behind them.

Edel stared up at the ceiling, a droplet of water falling on her nose. “The door is cursed, definitely,” she groaned as she got back to her feet.

“Hah! I told you!” Mozart crowed.

“I guess I could try it…” Melodia bit their lip, reaching a shaking hand out toward the handle. Just as they were about to touch it, they leapt back!

“You HAVE to be kidding me!” Hiyoko yelped as once again, the die came up one.

“Wow…” Ryouta breathed.

“These dice are absurd!” Sakuya cried. Even Anghel looked astounded at the number of terrible rolls they had gotten in a row.

A spider crawled across the door handle, eight teeny beady little eyes staring at Melodia menacingly.

“Maybe you’re right, this door is cursed!” Melodia squeaked, backing away. But this was the only way forward! This was the tallest tower left in the castle, there were no other entrances, and trying to scale it from outside was sure to fail.

“What are we going to do now?” Edel asked.

Suddenly a movement in the corner of Hiyoko’s eye caught her attention! You go hunter gather instincts! There! In the window to the library, open to catch the nice breeze, fluttered Oko-san!

“Oko-san! Did you finish your run around the track already?!” Ryouta smiled as he flapped to join them at the table.

“Coo coo! (The track is no match for the great Oko-san, not when there is pudding to be gained!)” Pudding? Why was it always pudding with Oko-san? Oh well.

“Wow the gang's all here this time! A rarity!” Hiyoko said brightly as Anghel dropped his monk figurine onto the map.

As the three of them contemplated the door, Mozart’s elf ears twitched and he looked behind them, towards the door to the stairs they had come from. Slowly, a sound could be heard. Running. Pounding feet. Edel retrieved her hammer, eying the door with trepidation. She thought they had defeated everything on their way up the tower… having to leave behind Savage Gale whose brave sacrifice allowed them to get this far.

A shadow appeared on the wall of the stairwell, growing larger and larger! She readied herself. This was it!

“You thought Savage Gale would be defeated by an army of orcs?! Never! Nothing shall get in the way of Savage Gale and the Pudding of Destiny!” A wonderfully familiar voice cried as their friend appeared in the doorway.

Orange robes and bowl cut shining in the torch light, Savage Gale didn’t stop their charge! “Wait it could be trapp-!”

“...I despise this game,” Sakuya muttered as Oko-san’s die roll came to a stop. A twenty stared up at them.

With a mighty blow, Savage Gale busted down the wooden door with a flying kick! It shattered into splinters, the way forward clear at last.

“Come friends, we must face our destiny!”

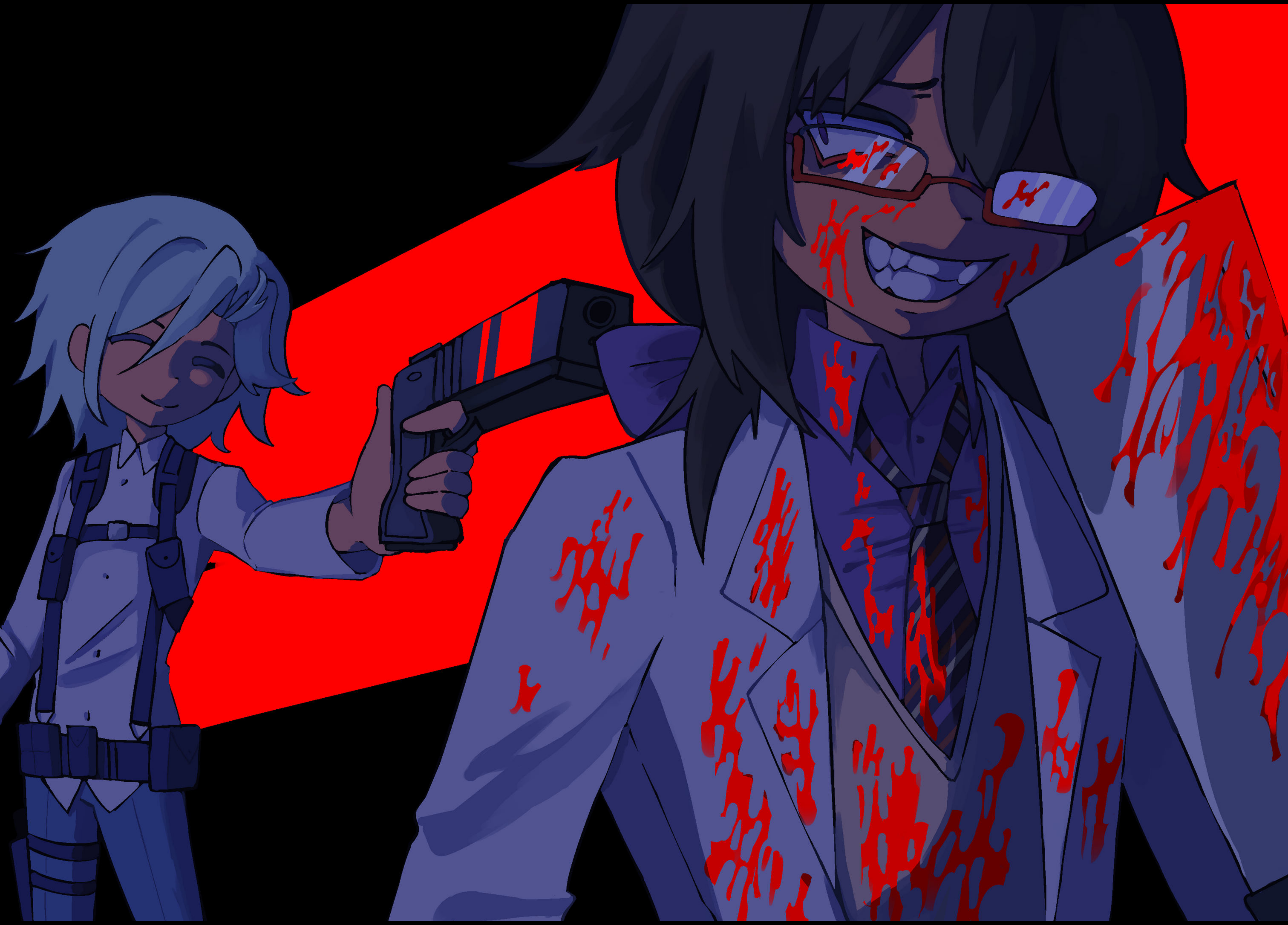
Melodia, Mozart and Edel Blau rushed after Savage Gale. Beyond the door was a large room, in the middle a throne, a huge chest behind it. But sitting on the throne… was their greatest enemy yet! The Lichlord, Master of the Abyss!

The bell rang, the sound far too loud for a library. “Aw, already? Are we meeting next week?” Hiyoko asked around the table as they all began packing up. Ryouta looked unsure, but that was normal. You never knew with his busy schedule. Sakuya was still muttering about the door and how it insulted his status or something. Oko-san had flown the coop, just a small dot in the distance outside.

“If the Gods allow it!” Anghel said loudly.

Hiyoko smiled.

End



AQUASPIDERART

Ever Orbiting Just Out of Reach

BY CODENAMETHEBIRD

It’s springtime and the morning sun shines in through the wide windows, flooding the room with light. Nageki hasn’t felt warm in a very long time but as he reaches out it flickers through his feathers and for a moment, he thought he felt something. But it was just a dream.

Someone is making a ruckus next to the front desk, and normally he wouldn’t pay it any mind. It all blurred together anyway, but for some reason he turned his head and there she stood.

The human girl, tall and imposing, her visible skin tanned and scarred from weather and claws. It was like he had been sent back long before the fall of humanity, before the rise of it even, but she wore a school uniform if messily thrown on and there was a red ribbon braided into golden hair.

She looked like the sun, but Nageki knew that even so, he would never feel such rays again

And then she opened her mouth—

✧✧✧

Hiyoko’s parents had told her to return home by nightfall, whispering warnings of great howling beasts roaming the woods. Then they swept her off her feet, swinging her around the room as they tickled her tummy and giggled at how delicious she would be.

Mom and Dad were brave and strong, the mightiest warriors in the entire world! (Hiyoko kindly ignored that they had set down their weapons to be dip-mats or something boring like that. Warriors and hunters were much cooler!) And Hiyoko was going to be just like them. Well, she would be, if she could just get over this wall.

There was nothing particularly special about the wall. It was pretty normal, all things considered. It surrounded some kind of orphanage or something. Her parents told her once, but she wasn’t really listening.

No, this wall was only important because she made it important. This was the first of many walls she was going to climb, whether they liked it or not. She would climb and climb until she was the most powerful of them all. That’s how one became strong— well, at least she was pretty sure that’s how it worked.

There was just a slight problem. It was getting dark, and she already had issues clinging to the brick exterior. But that wasn’t going to stop her, no matter how many more times she had to fall back onto the dirt.

The bricks’ rough texture bit into her hands as her bare feet tried to find grip. And then she felt it, a crack she hadn’t found before. And with all her little body’s might, she launched herself upwards, grappling her arms over the edge. Hah! She did it; she won, she Hiyoko Tosaka was the gre—

Then her arms gave out, and she tumbled back to the earth. Ow.

Dazed, she barely could make out the shadow of a small bird crossing her vision. The amber setting sun illuminated behind them. It was like they were an angel from above.

“Are you an idiot?”

Huh, Hiyoko felt her breath catch. Was this love at first sight? No, no that was silly, it must just be her imagination—

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“Nageki! We are really in America, your homeland!”

“Miss Tosaka, just because I’m a mourning dove doesn’t mean I was born here…”

“I know, I know, but still, your ancestors once flew through these lands, you must feel some connection to them!”

Hiyoko skipped around on the white sand beach, as if the ground below did not sting from the heat. Her arms swung to a dance only she knew as she dragged him out to where the waves hit the shore.

The water was freezing as it lapped at his talons, and Hiyoko fell over in a fit of laughter as she saw the way he fluttered backwards at its touch.

The noon sun scalded him, he would be feeling the burns for days, and even Hiyoko wouldn't be spared.

Once upon a time, Hiyoko promised him she would show him the world. Nageki had smiled at her, accepting such a vow, but returned back to his apartment with Hitori, knowing such a dream was impossible.

Even now, as he reached out his wing and she leaned her cheek into the curve of his feathers, he didn't believe he deserved such a gift.

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It was midnight, and the moon had long since escaped the Earth's shadow. Someone was yelling orders, it might have been the janitor, but that was silly, why would he still be at the school? Hiyoko didn't pay much mind to it at all.

Instead, she fought through the fog, through the remains of The King's kind yet so very cruel dream and reached her hand out, grasping for something—something, so very special.

And then her hands settled over a prone form. Despite the still haze of sleep, she felt finally awake from the nightmare.

Nageki was a ghost. She knew that. That his form was fragile, barely held together, could fade at any moment. But it was there. It stayed in this school, in this world, because that was what Nageki desired more than peace. His continued existence a testament to his will, his strength.

She thought he was going to leave her to the dream, to move on, to walk the path to the next life. Part of her knew she should have been supportive of such a thing, that it was where everyone must go in the end. But the desire to grab onto him and never let go gripped her, and only now that she felt him here did it finally fade.

What a strange thought, as her fingers traced over every little speckle upon his feathers, barely visible in the light of the moon. It was probably just the adrenaline from the flames, from watching how he cried in that lonely tower, accepting oblivion.

It was just her imagination, she thought, as Nageki opened up his eyes.

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It was almost daybreak.

No, the sun was about to dip below the horizon.

That wasn’t right either. What time was it?

Morning, evening, day or night? What was any of it at all?

Who were they? Who was this little light? Were they the little light, a light that couldn’t even light up a little of the dark?

Nageki, or maybe it was more accurate to call him the thing that called himself Nageki. Nageki died five years ago when he stepped into the fire after all, his body turned to ash. Well mostly, but he doesn’t know that yet, or maybe he’ll never know? He’s dead after all.

The one who called himself Nageki cradled the little light that could not break the dark, a light he was almost certain was a young girl he knew. A young girl the real Nageki never met, or did he? It was all so blurry.

That girl who was a child of the sun and the dawning of the day. But this wasn’t her. She died, her light snuffed out and with it his hope of warmth.

She died… because of him. Not the thing that called himself Negeki— no, that thing wasn’t capable of anything anymore. This was Nageki’s failure, to finish what he started, to burn it all to ash. For a singular moment, he almost burned as bright as she did, but it wasn’t enough, and the hope faded with his flame.

“Nageki,” the one who might be Hiyoko Tosaka whispered, “I think my imagination is getting the better of me.”

Even in death, the light that was once Hiyoko, was still doubting her own mind.

With only a little prompting, the little light followed after Nageki, maybe he was Nageki, to the windowsill. Where Hiyoko had spent many a sleepy afternoon lazing upon, while he looked on from the shadows cast by the bookshelves.

There was no warm amber light anymore. It was dark, yet there were no stars, no moon. What time was it again?

“Hiyoko, I’m sorry. I failed you. I failed all of you.”

Yes, it was Nageki Fujishiro. Still underestimating his worth even in death.

And then the little light laughed. She would never again glow in the daylight, doomed to be lost eternally in darkness. But still, she warmed Nageki’s barren heart.

“Nageki, that's silly, you’re right by my side. How could you have failed me?”

The wisp of light that remained of Hiyoko reached out and cupped at his transparent cheek.

“Hey,” she whispered, her voice fading, in and out like the waves Nageki never got to see. “I can feel you now.”

Hiyoko was never very good at understanding herself, but even so, she always said the things Nageki needed to hear.

Nageki was a liar who put everyone else above himself. Who tore himself to pieces to give to everyone who needed it. It didn’t matter if it destroyed him.

“Miss— Hiyoko, I’m right here.”

They would never learn to be better. They would never leave this school until it was time to pass from this world. Still, for this moment, the world stood still for them. When there was no sun or stars in the sky to tell them if it was day or night, nothing keeping them just out of reach.

It was enough, and who knows, maybe the next world will be kinder. Until then, the Earth kept up its seemingly endless cycle around the sun.

End

JUDGEMENT

Countdown

BY CRESCENTTWINS

1:
The bird weeps alone—
Where is the friend I followed
A trust lost to lies

2:
The night sky beckons
A galactic train rattling:
The death of a quail

3:
Even a dark room
Can become a paradise
If you wait and think—

4:
To build a kingdom
Where no one hurts or is sad
All must be The King

5:
A lighthouse, a throne—
A train filled with frightened hearts
Will surely see them

6:
A quail in darkness
Seeks answers borne from his fear
What will happen next?

7:
Good birds should not lie
No hurt, no sadness lives here
All will be happy

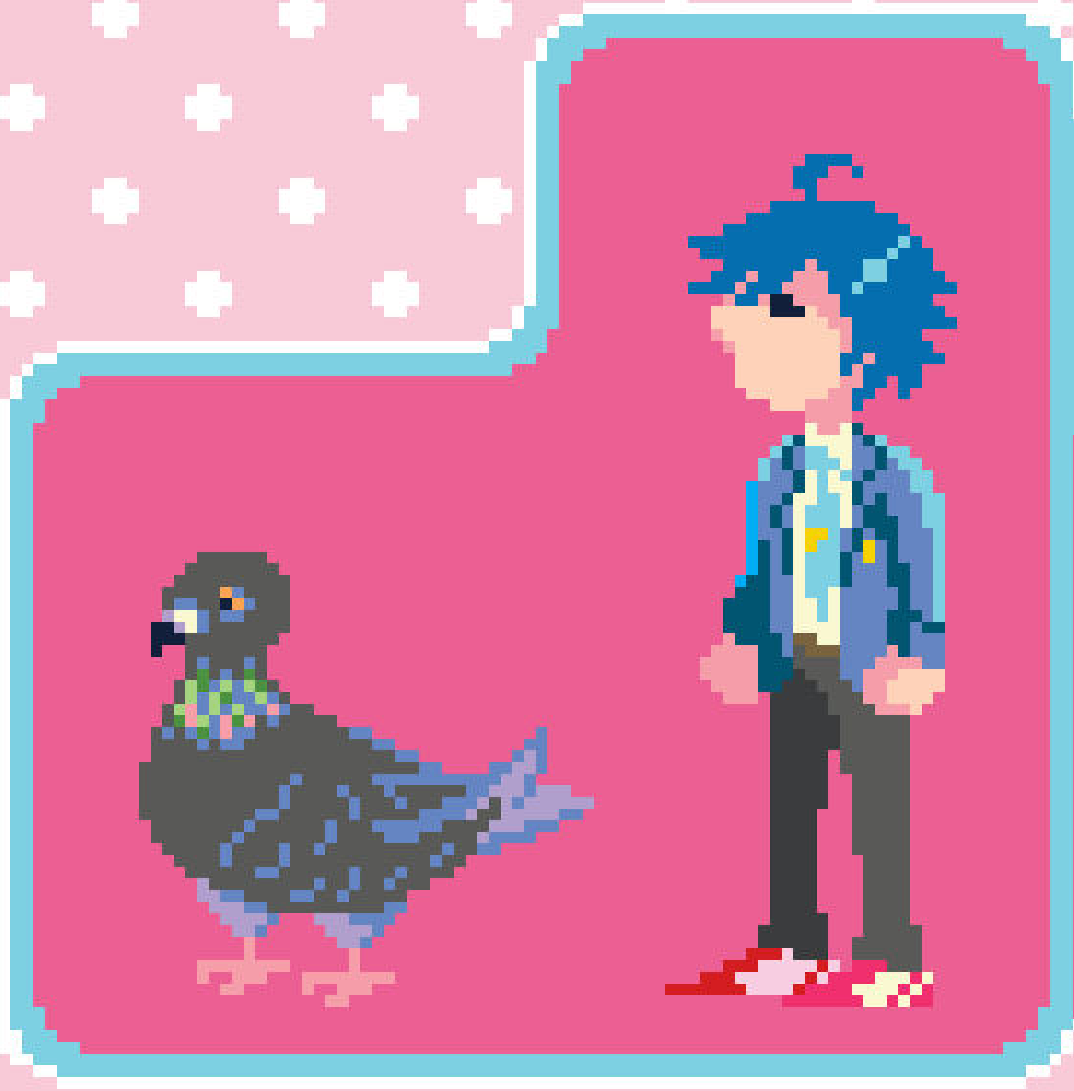
8:
A very nice dream
A kingdom born for the dead
It beckons all birds

9:
A poor little quail
Falls victim to a cruel trick
Did he deserve pain?

10:
A beautiful end
Happily ever after
When one with The King

@cuttledraws

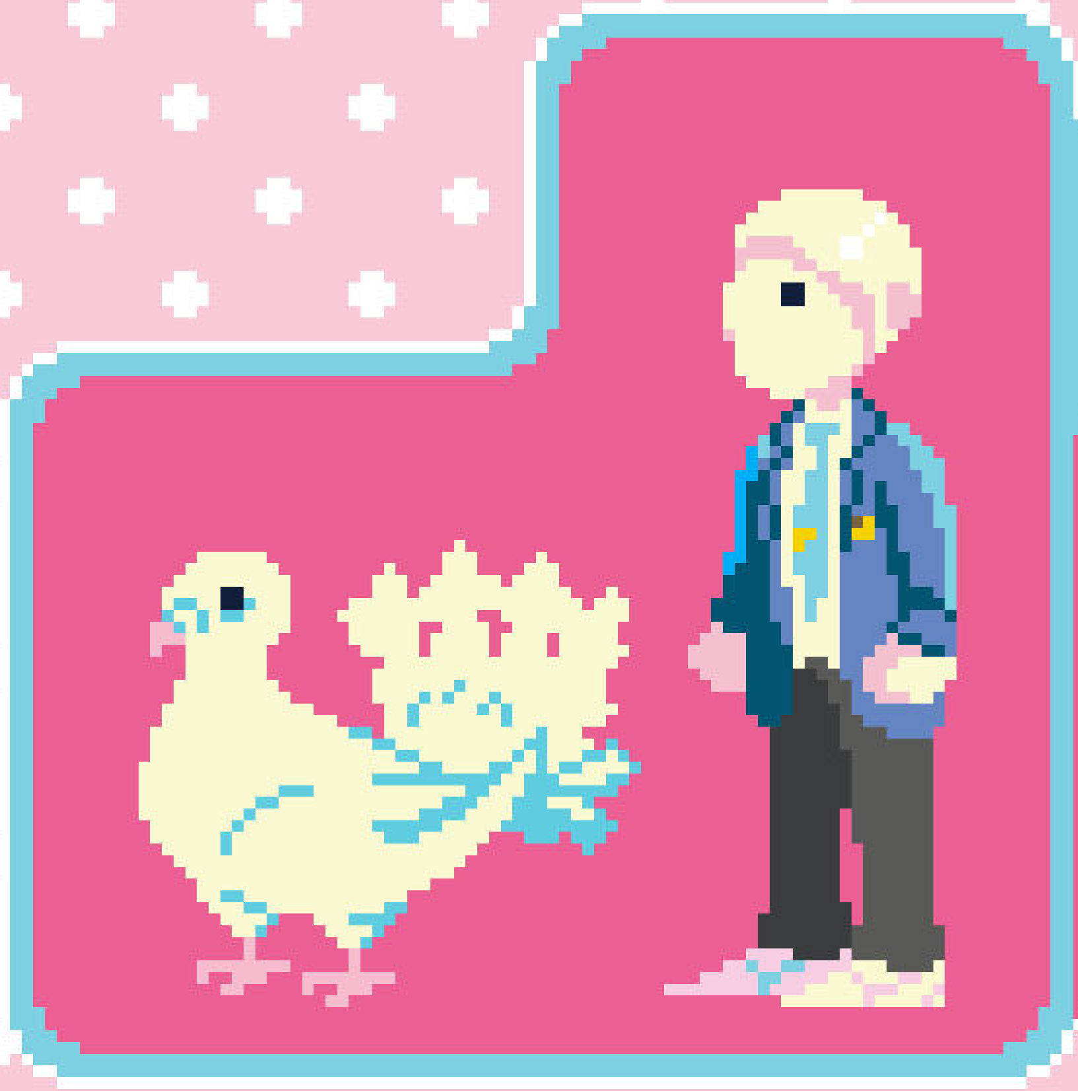
Bird Spotter Guide



RYOUTA

ROCK DOVE

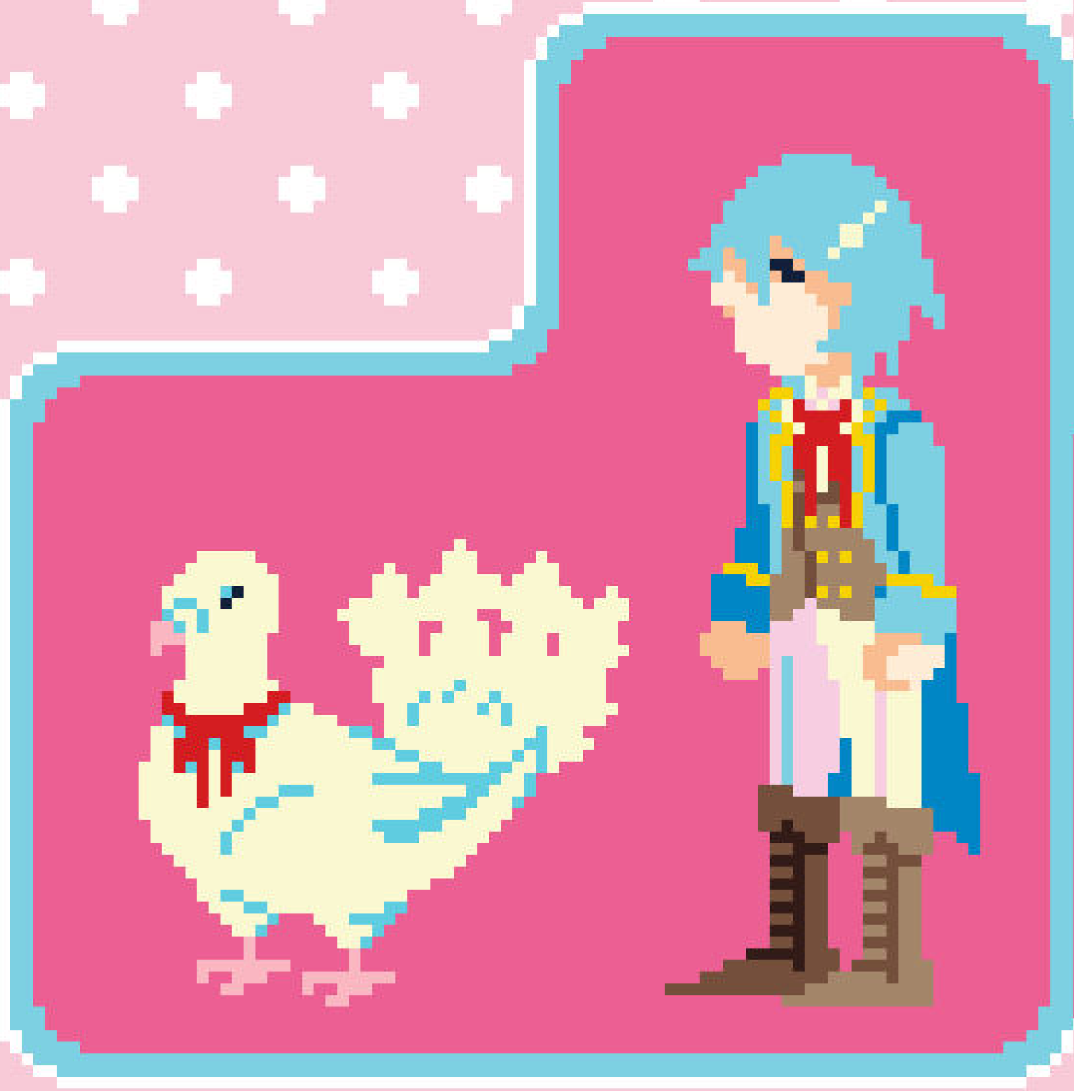
★★☆☆☆



OKOSAN

FANTAIL PIGEON

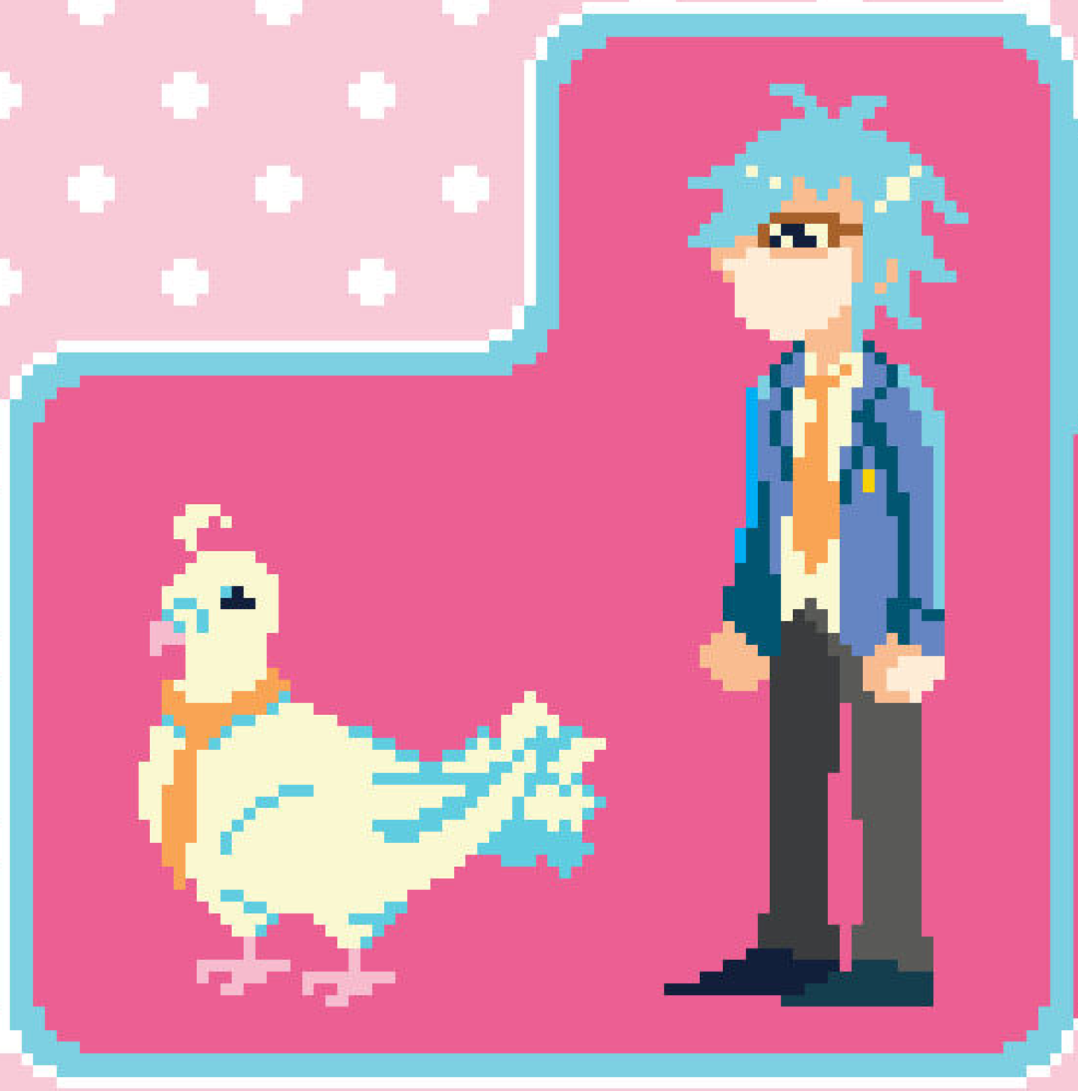
★★★★☆



SAKUYA

FANTAIL PIGEON

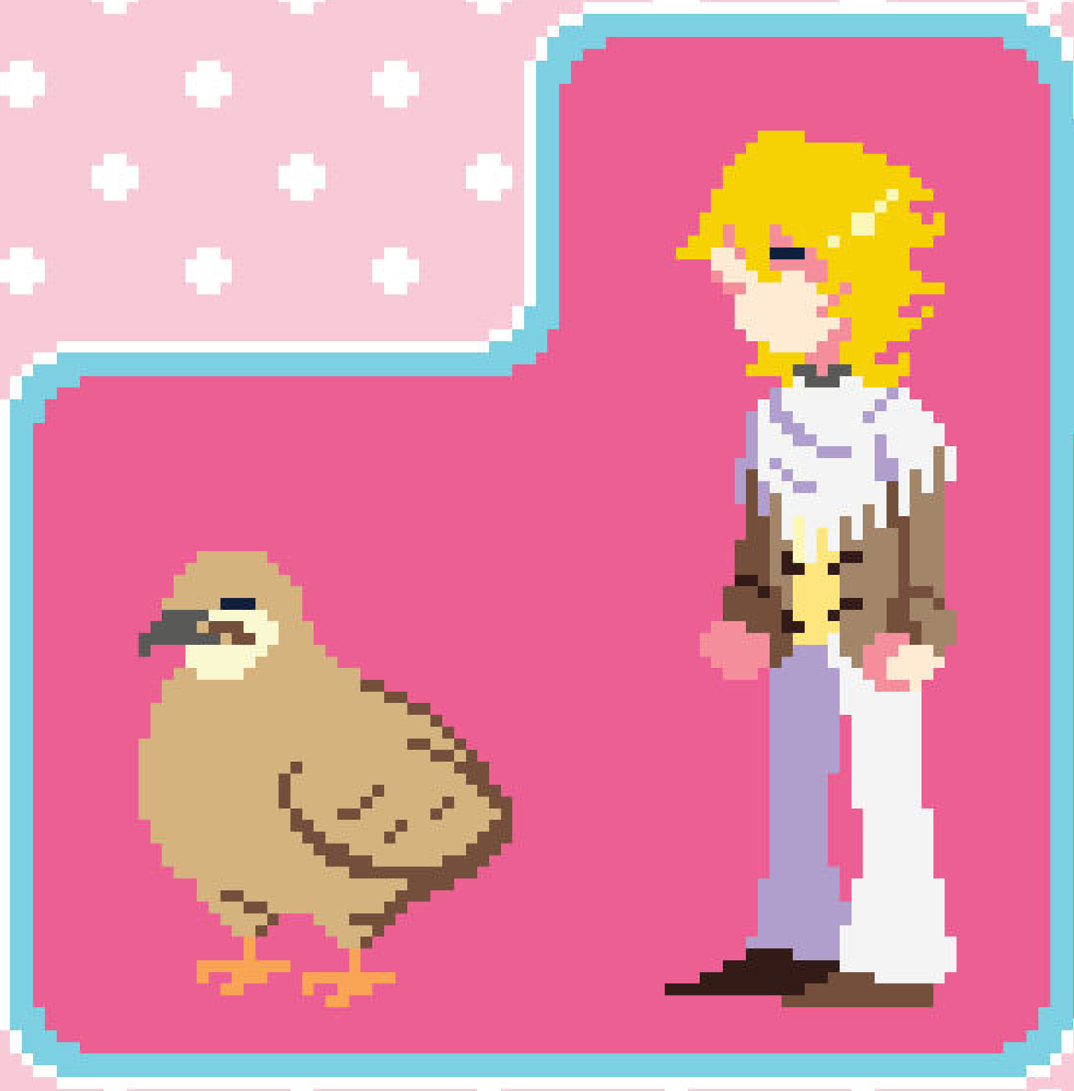
★★★★★



YUUYA

FANTAIL DOVE

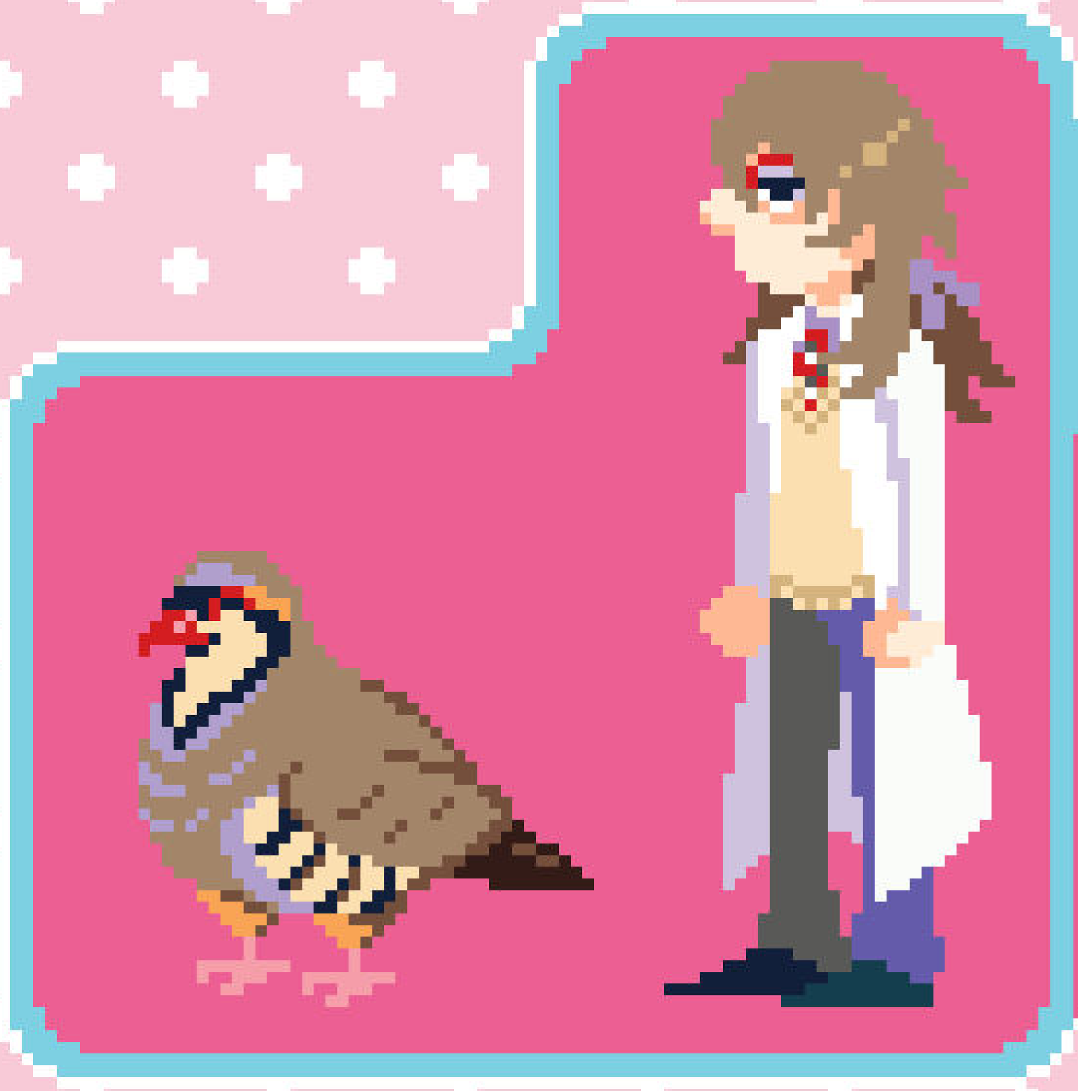
★★★☆☆



KAZUAKI

KING QUAIL

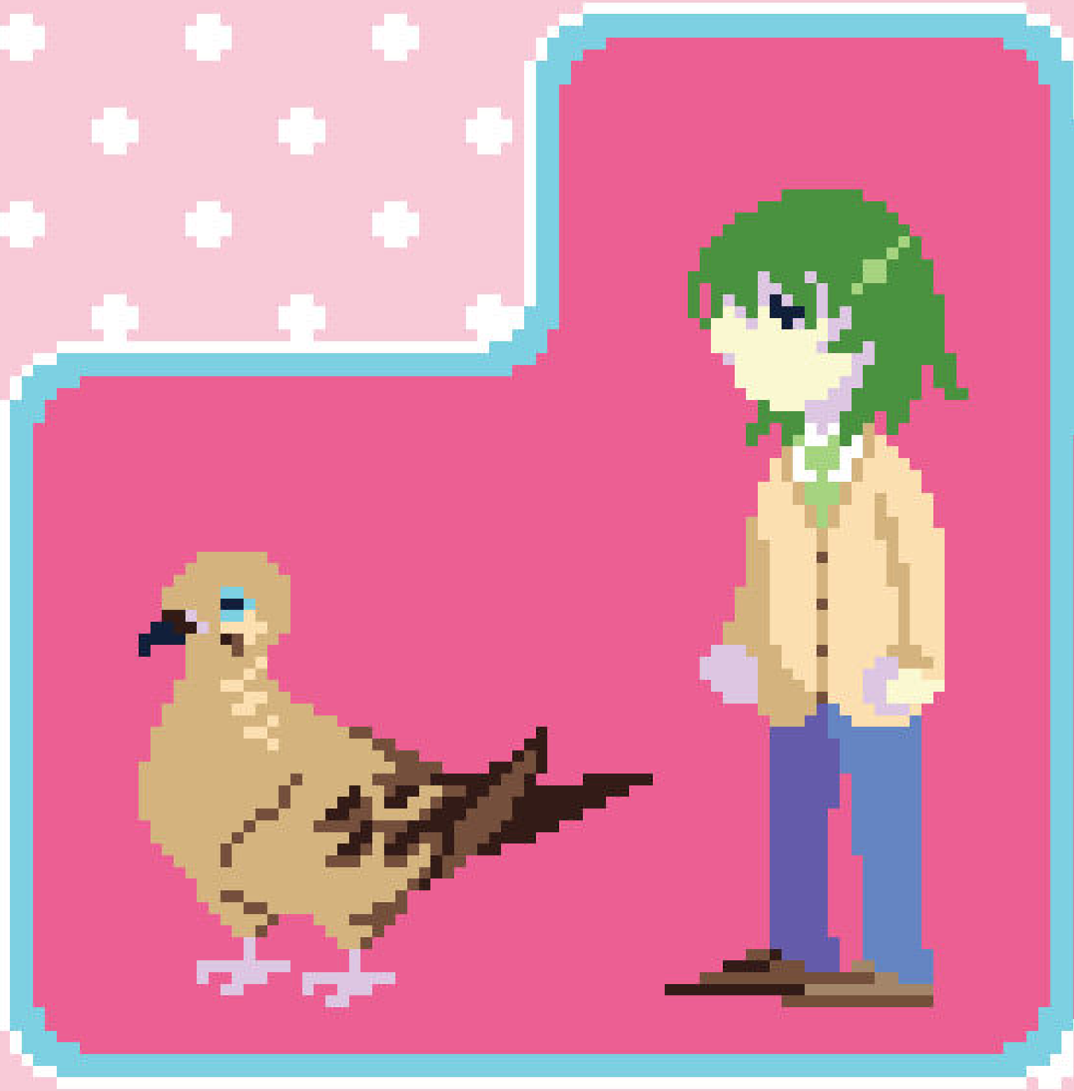
★★★☆☆



SHUU

CHUKAR PARTRIDGE

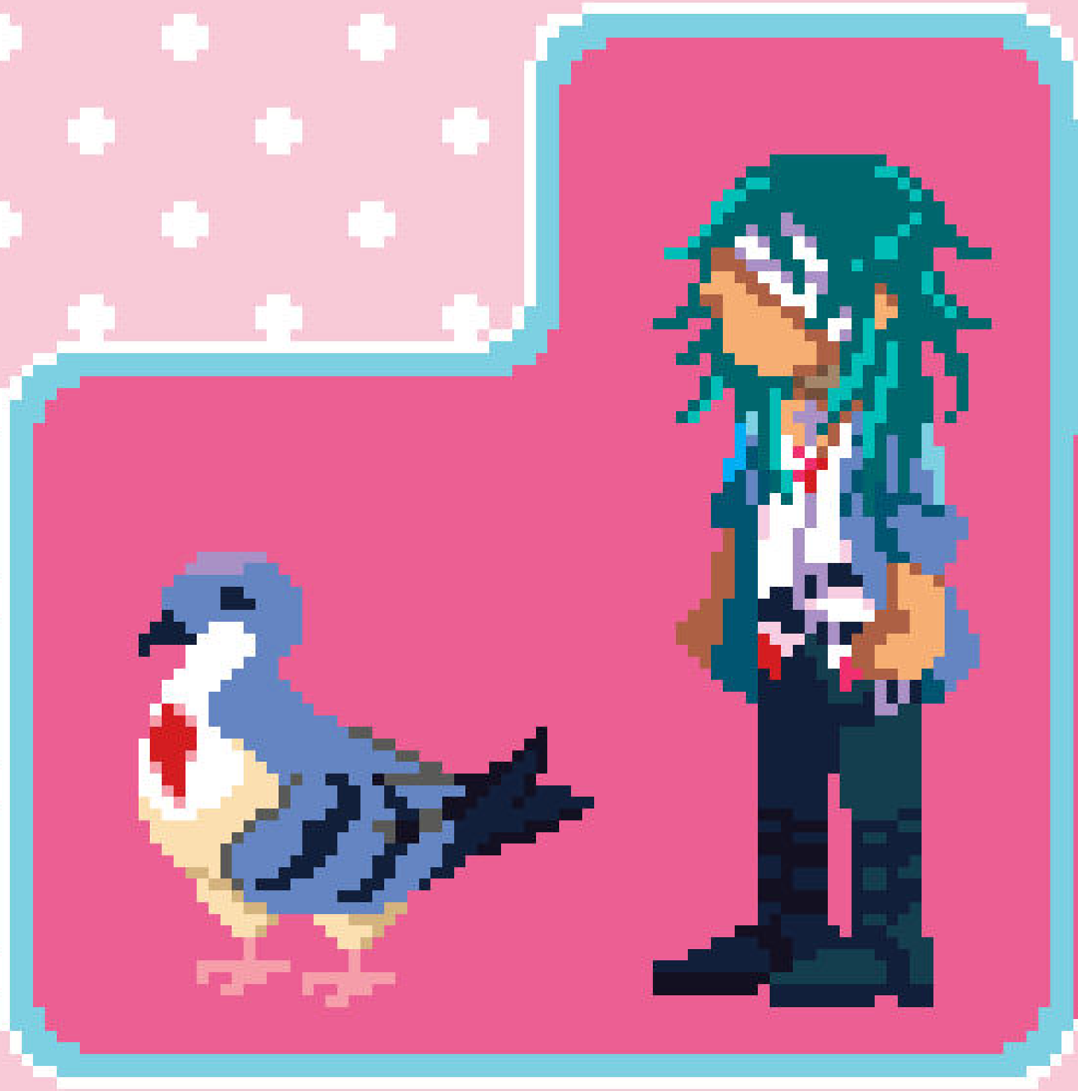
☆☆☆☆☆



NAGEKI

MOURNING DOVE

★★☆☆☆



ANGHEL

LUZON DOVE

★★★★★

♥ WITH THANKS TO ST. PIGEONATION'S INSTITUTE ♥

Thanks for reading!

RYOUHEI
USAGIRYOUHEI-ART

PINE
PINECONEPAL

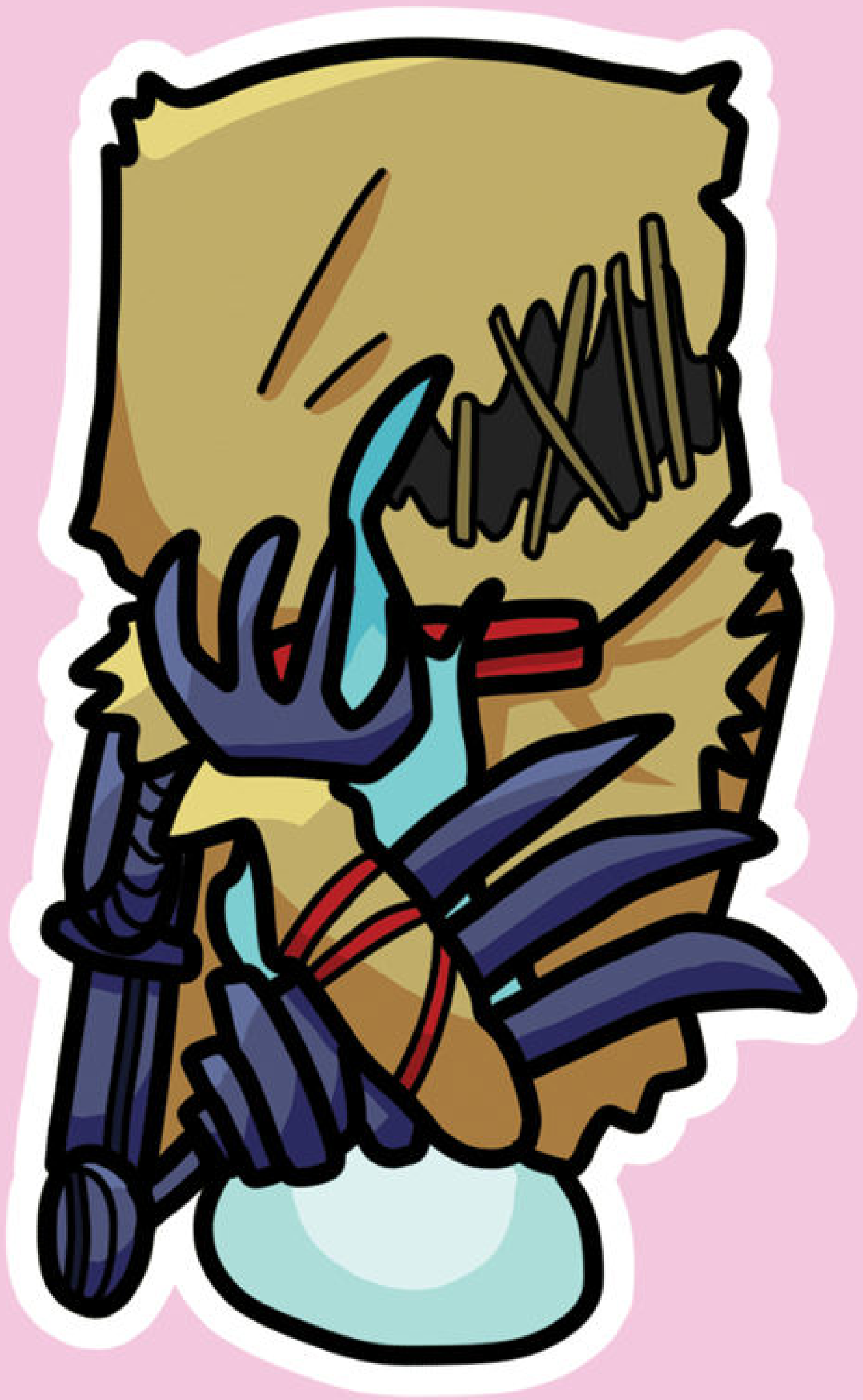
YUN
THE-PIGEOLYMPICS

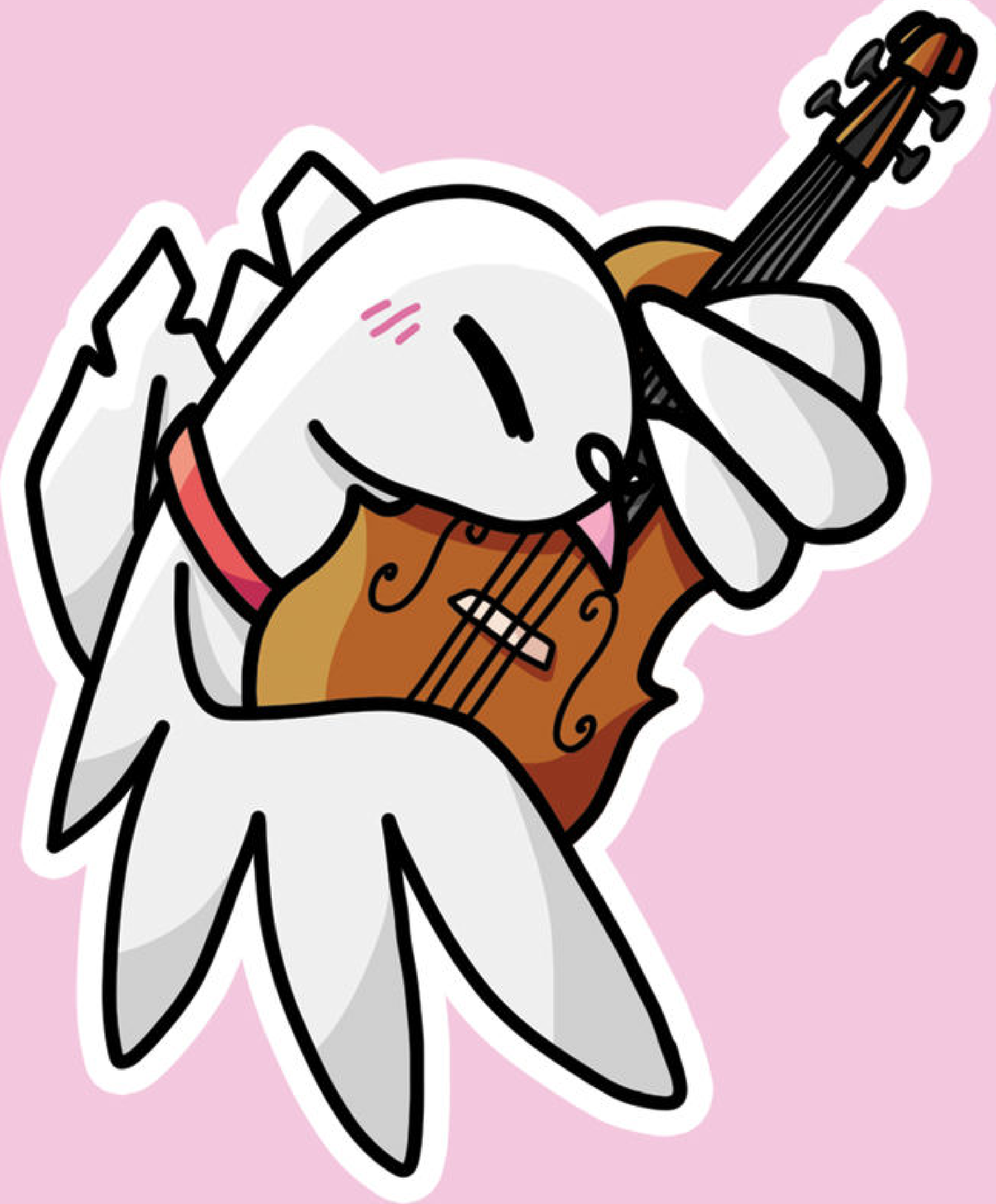
CHICKEN
CHICKEN-MC-NUGGETS

SOLAR
EMPEROR_NACHT

BEAR
A_LITERAL_BEAR

ZAXIADUS
ZAXIADUS





ZAXIADUS
ZAXIADUS

✧ Credits ✧

WRITERS

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BY CRESCENTTWINS - HAPPINESSDECEIT ON TWITTER

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"BLUE FOOTPRINTS AND MUSIC NOTES"
BY LINK - ARCHESTER-CREATIONS ON TUMBLR

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"A SIMPLE-ISH STUDY DATE"
BY SUNNY/OMORI

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"THE DREADED DOOR"
BY HAMSTERCHEESE7 - BUGGYISBEST ON TWITTER

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"EVER ORBITING JUST OUT OF REACH"
BY CODENAMETHEBIRD - CODENAMETHEBIRD ON TUMBLR

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"COUNTDOWN"
BY CRESCENTTWINS - HAPPINESSDECEIT ON TWITTER

SPOT ARTISTS

HIGHWAYKINGS
ON TUMBLR

CUTTLEDRAWS
ON TWITTER

MIDNIGHTISDED
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EMPEROR_NACHT

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MCURII

FRILLBACKSTUDIOS
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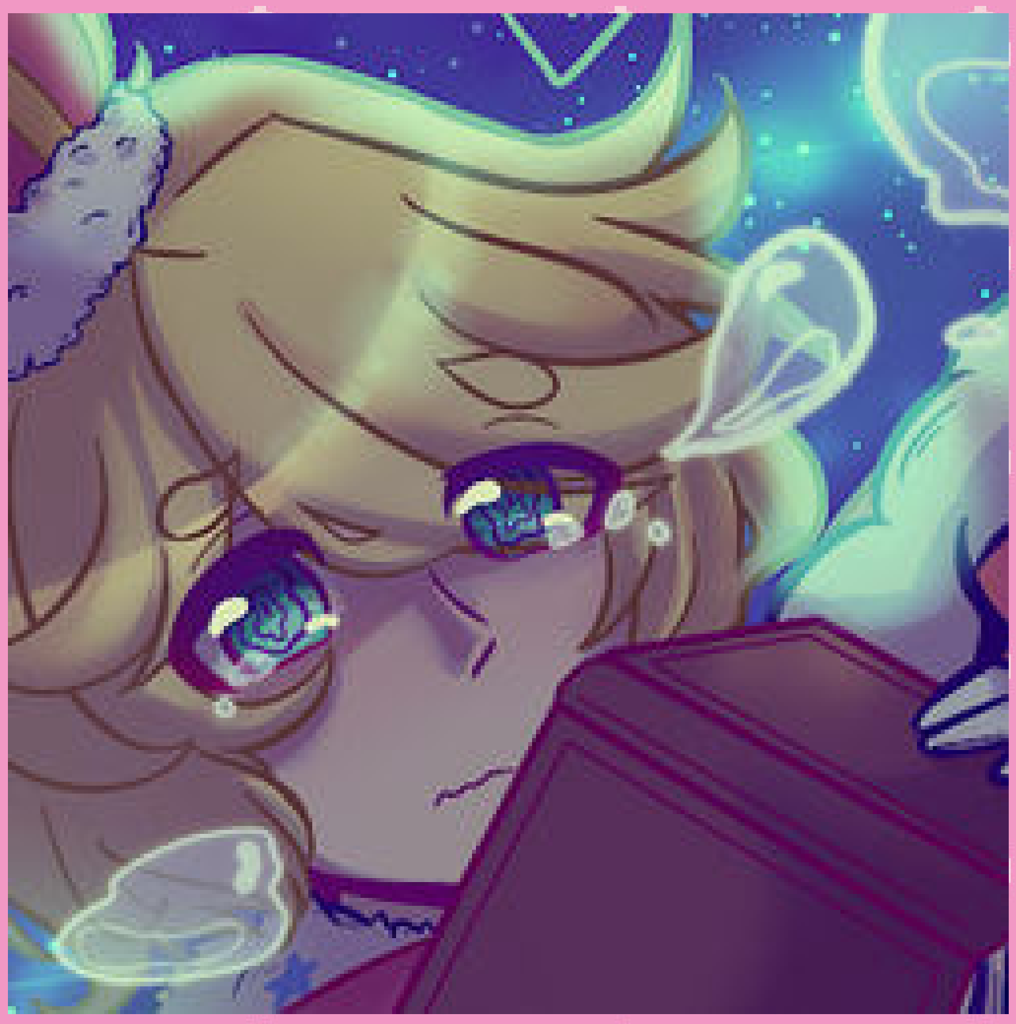
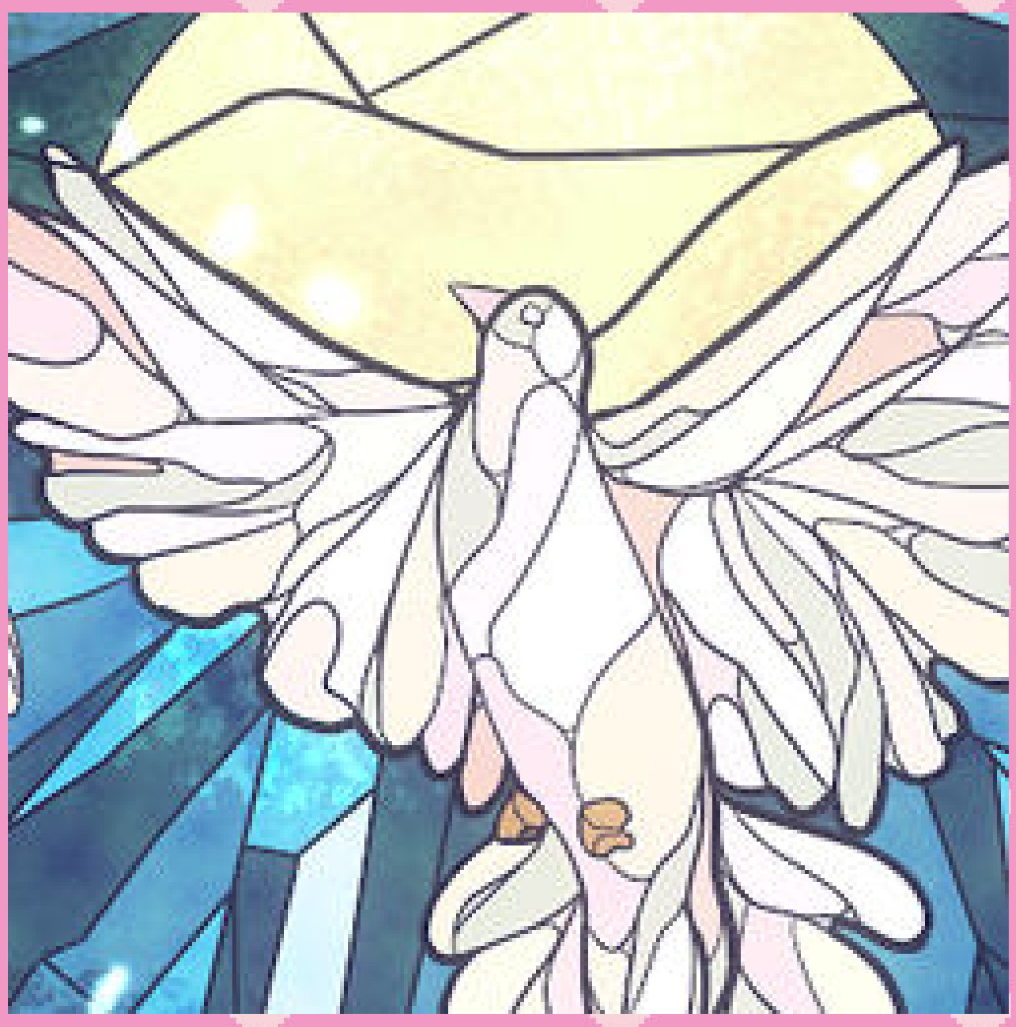


IXKYU
IXKYU_

RYOUHEI
USAGIRYOUHEI-ART

LUNAHRAS
LUNAHRASDRAWS
LUNAHRAS-DRAWS

ADRI
THEROBOTICSCIENTIST



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BOXDEVS

HAYDEN
HIGHWAYKINGS

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MIDNIGHTISDED

THEKAGEPRO24
DAMNEDLEN
THEKAGEPRO24

TRAY
YUUYAANGHEL

SPYROMANCY
SPYROMANCY

MOZART
AMAMOZART

ZOË PEÑA
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ORCA
LABOR9

RATHOE
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ZAXIADUS

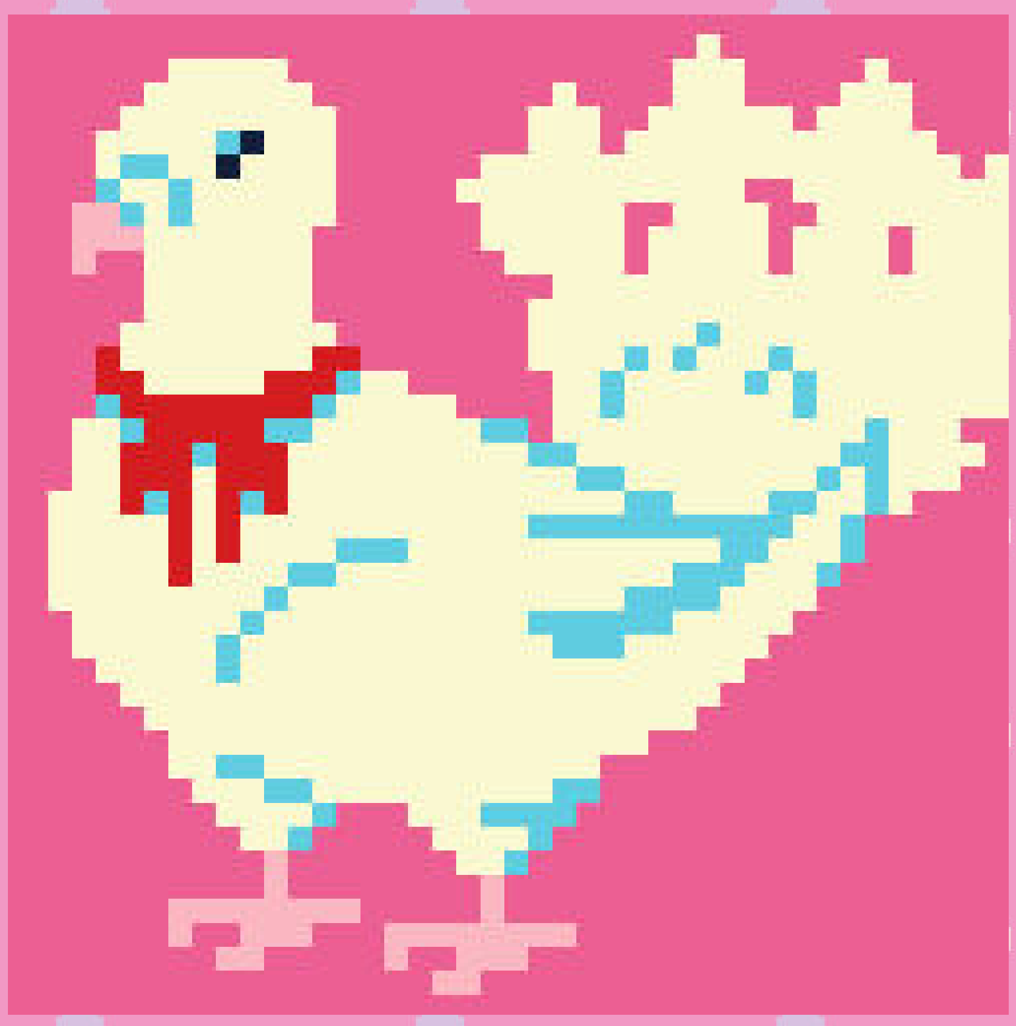
BEAR
A_LITERAL_BEAR

BEAN
BOOPERBEANV3

CUTTLEDRAWS
CUTTLEDRAWS

CURI
MCURII

AMAM
PIROLISCO
NYAMAM



VICTOR HANNIBAL
VINEGARHANNIBAL

COVER ARTISTS

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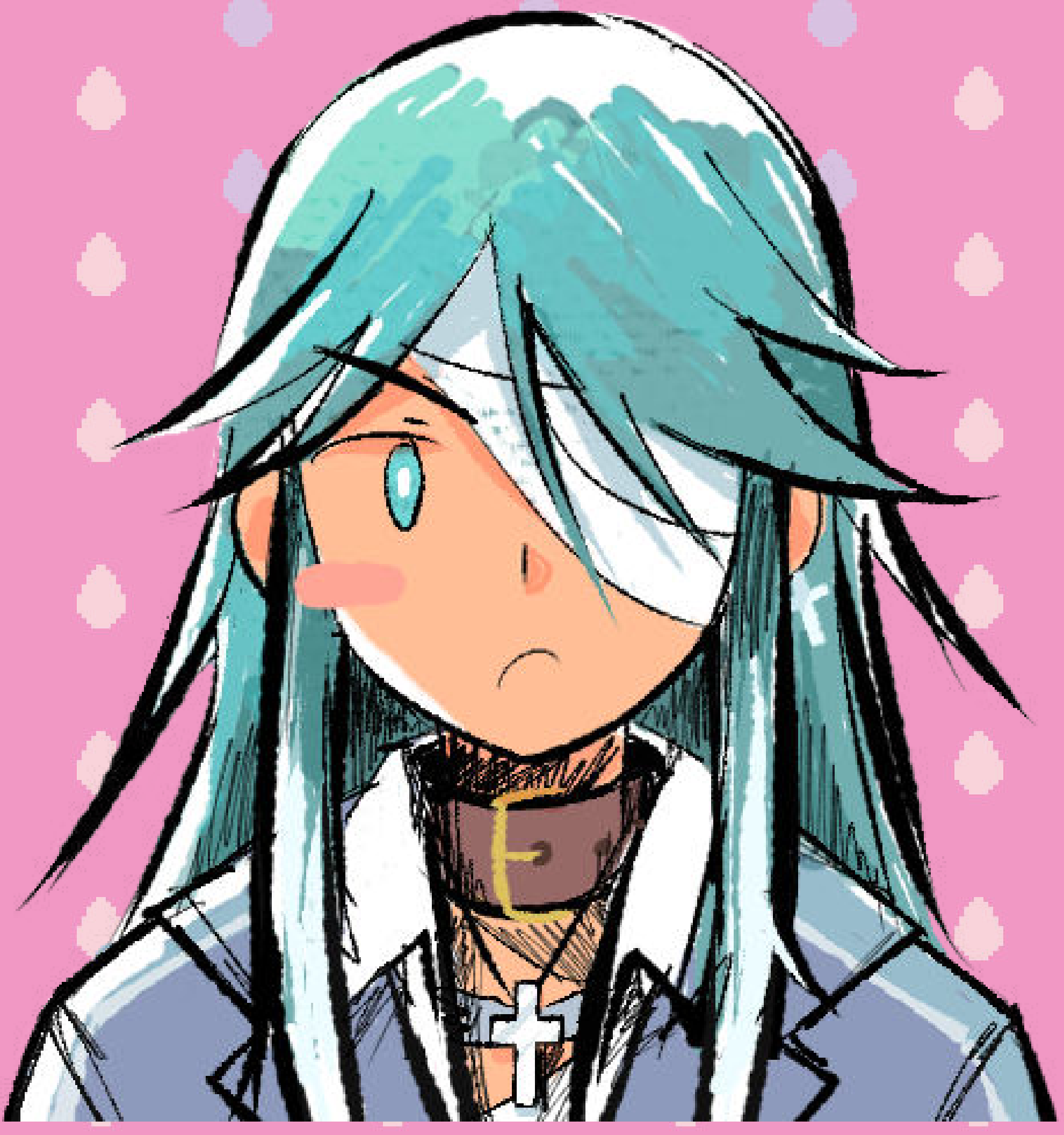

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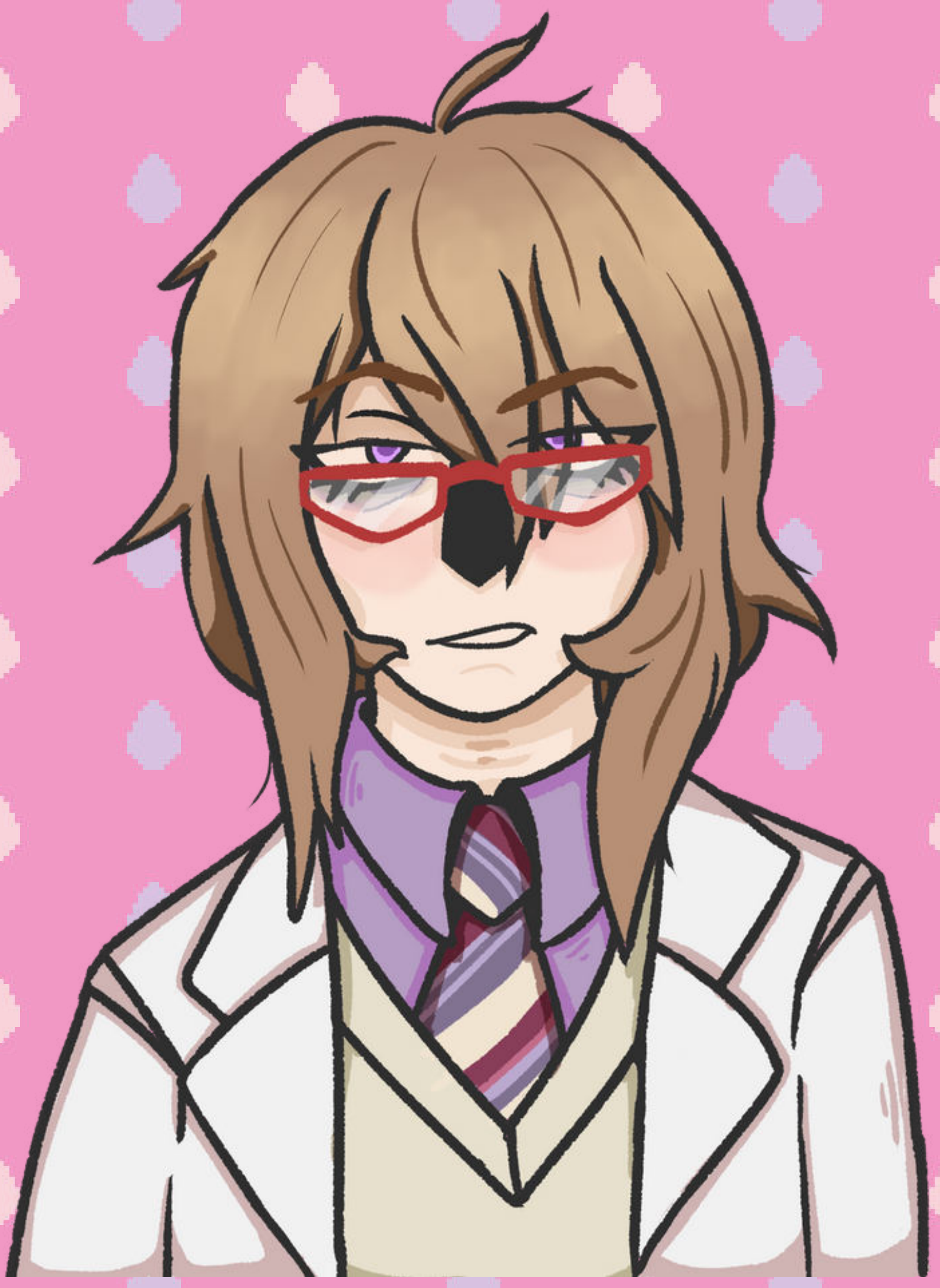

MODS

FORMATTING / GRAPHICS BY VICTOR HANNIBAL
VINEGARHANNIBAL ON TWITTER

HEY EVERYONE, THANKS FOR READING! THERE WERE SOME BUMPS GETTING THIS ZINE TO THE FINISH LINE, BUT EVERYONE WORKED SO HARD AND I'M VERY HAPPY TO HAVE BEEN PART OF IT. H.B. IS ONE OF THOSE THINGS I'VE LIKED FOR YEARS AND IT DESERVED A ZINE!

SOCIAL MEDIA BY HAMSTERCHEESE7
BUGGYISBEST ON TWITTER

HI I'M HAM! I ADORE HATOFUL, ANGHEL, AZAMI, AND NANAKI ARE MY FAVS! THIS ZINE IS SO FUN AND FULL OF GOOD STUFF. THANKS FOR CHECKING IT OUT!

DISCORD MODDING BY ZAXIADUS
ZAXIADUS ON TWITTER

HI!! ZAX HERE! THIS PROJECT WAS SO GREAT TO BE A PART OF, I REALLY ENJOYED GETTING TOGETHER WITH A BUNCH OF HATOKARE ENTHUSIASTS TO TALK ABOUT THE GAME AND HYPE UP EACH OTHER'S WORK!! THANKS FOR TAKING THE TIME TO FLIP THROUGH :)

PROOFREADING BY SUNNY/OMORI
A DISCORD EXCLUSIVE

HEYA HIYA, EVERYONE! SEEING THIS ZINE TAKE FLIGHT MAKES ME SO HAPPY; IT JUST GOES TO SHOW THAT FEEDING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE SCONE REALLY HELPS OUT! ME AND THE MODS TRULY ARE BIRDS OF A FEATHER, HAHA. OKAY, JOKES ASIDE, I'M GENUINELY PROUD OF EVERYONE IN THIS ZINE, AND I'M HONORED TO HAVE BEEN A PART OF IT!